IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claims 1-13 (Canceled).

14. (Currently Amended) A process for preparing a lactic acid bacterial starter culture, comprising:

culturing at least one strain of lactic acid bacteria under aeration in a nutrient medium which contains at least one porphyrin compound ~~is present or is added~~; and

harvesting the cultured bacteria.

15. (Previously Presented) The process according to Claim 14, further comprising packaging the harvested bacteria.

16. (Currently Amended) The process according to Claim 14, wherein the strain of lactic acid bacteria ~~are~~ is selected from at least one strain in the group consisting of *Lactococcus*, *Lactobacillus*, *Leuconostoc*, *Propionibacterium*, *Bifidobacterium*, and *Streptococcus salivarius*.

17. (Currently Amended) The process according to Claim 14, wherein the porphyrin compound is selected from at least one compound selected from the group consisting of uroporphyrins, coproporphyrins, protoporophyrins, haematoporphyrins, chlorophylls and chlorophyllin, salts and esters thereof, and complexes thereof with an iron atom.

18. (Currently Amended) The process according to Claim 14, wherein said nutrient medium contains ~~the porphyrin compound is added at~~ a concentration of approximately 2.5 to approximately 200 micromoles per liter of ~~culture medium~~ the porphorin compound.

19. (Currently Amended) The process according to Claim 14, wherein the culture is aerated so as to maintain, during the whole duration of the culture, an oxygen content which is ~~equal to~~ at least 5 ~~millimoles~~ micromoles per liter of culture medium.

20. (Previously Presented) The process according to Claim 14, wherein the bacteria are harvested between 5 and 24 hours after the start of the culturing.

21. (Previously Presented) The process according to Claim 14, further comprising storing the harvested lactic acid bacteria.

22. (Previously Presented) The process according to Claim 21, wherein the lactic acid bacteria are stored at approximately 4°C.

23. (Currently Amended) The process according to Claim 21, ~~wherein the lactic acid bacteria are stored in frozen or lyophilized form~~ further comprising freezing or lyophilizing the harvested cultured bacteria, and storing the frozen or lyophilized bacteria.

24. (Previously Presented) The lactic acid bacterial starter culture obtained by a process according to ~~any one of~~ Claims 14 ~~to 23~~.

25. (Previously Presented) A process for preparing a fermented product, comprising seeding a medium to be fermented with a lactic acid bacterial starter culture according to Claim 24.

26. (Previously Presented) A process for increasing the survival of lactic acid bacteria, comprising

culturing the lactic acid bacteria under aerobic conditions in a medium containing at least one porphyrin compound ~~is~~.

27. (New) A process for preparing a lactic acid bacterial starter culture, comprising:

culturing at least one strain of lactic acid bacteria under aeration in a nutrient medium which contains at least one porphyrin compound, wherein said nutrient medium is aerated so as to contain at least 5 micromoles of oxygen per liter, and

concentrating the cultured bacteria by centrifugation or filtration.

28. (New) The process of Claim 27, wherein said porphyrin compound is hemin.

29. (New) The process of Claim 27, wherein said porphyrin compound is protophorin IX.

30. (New) The process of Claim 27, wherein said porphyrin compound is chlorophyllin.

31. (New) The process of Claim 27, wherein said lactic acid bacteria is *Lactococcus lactis*.

32 (New) The process of Claim 27, wherein said lactic acid bacteria is selected from *Lactococcus lactis* subgroup strains MG1363, IL1403, IL582, IL801, IL896, Z105, Z106, and Z191.

33. (New) The process of Claim 27, further comprising freezing or lyophilizing said concentrated cultured bacteria, when freezing optionally with a cryoprotectant, and

optionally storing said frozen or lyophilized bacteria.

34. (New) A lactic acid bacteria starter culture prepared by the process of Claim 27.

35. (New) A lactic acid bacteria starter culture prepared by the process of Claim 33.